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AUTHOR Shuy, Roger W.
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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines the development of an exciting set of changes going on in the field of linguistics at the present time. From studies of the ethnography of communication, generative semantics, variation theory, and pidgins and creoles has come a convergence of interests which highlights the concept of gradatum (rather than continuum) in language. This concept is considered in the light of three aspects--stigmatization, favoring, and hypercorrection--which have clear bearing on first and second language learning and teaching. It is pointed out that a number of complex issues are involved, including context, setting, intention, presupposition, and variability and that decisions concerning bilingual education must be seen in relation to a larger number of questions than have generally been acknowledged in the past. It is also noted that speakers may deliberately select forms which have not been traditionally valued by the classroom. Lastly, it argued that the unintentional selection of stigmatized features of language is a relatively untapped area for learning about language learning and that the time has come to develop a sophisticated program of language learning which utilizes the predictable stages (including errors) in the acquisition of desired language forms. (Author/LG)

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THE CONCEPT OF GRADATUM IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Roger W. Shuy
Georgetown University
American Psychological Association
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A great many famous separations in history have developed into troublesome paradoxes. The presumed separation of church and state has never been cleansed of its internal difficulties and the separation of executive and legislative power, derived from the writings of Locke and Montesquieu, has proved more than wearisome to the Nixon administration. In linguistics, the separation of language from the realistic context in which it is used has been equally difficult and every effort to preserve this separation has, in recent years, met with increasing disfavor. The view of linguistics which excludes the variational and functional aspects of language from formal linguistic analysis and describes such characteristics as trivial, mere performance, or relegates them to the semantic component is finding disfavor at a rapid pace. C.-J. Bailey has used Ferdinand de Saussure's term static to refer to the frameworks of both structural and transformational linguistics (1973). By this term, he refers to the exclusion of variation of any sort, including time, function, socio-economic status, sex and ethnicity, from the purview of formal linguistic analysis. Thus, when Noam Chomsky states, "Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by performance variations" (Chomsky 1965:4), he is illustrating the static view of language quite succinctly. Thus linguists more or less abdicated any responsibility for studying many of the interesting things about language--the dynamic aspects--in a vain effort to be "purely linguistic", whatever that might mean.

One clear separation which has been vigorously maintained in linguistics over the years is the separation between synchronic and diachronic studies. Such a notion dates back many years in the field but is perhaps most notably stated by Bernard Bloch when he attempted to define the goal of phonological analysis as the study of ". . . the totality of the possible utterances of one speaker at one time in using a language to interact with one other speaker. . ." (Bloch 1948:7). Such a theory would seem to imply that a speaker's phonological system is somehow cut off from the developments which gave it life. If, on the other hand, one were to view life as constant movement, one might also hypothesize that language is in equally constant movement in its futile effort to catch up with life. That is, life keeps moving away from language's attempts at freezing it long enough to interact with it.

Thus, the period which we might call structuralist was actually no different from the following transformationalist era with respect to the adherence to the study of static rather than dynamic language. But by the late sixties some fascinating new developments were taking place in several fields at the same time.

Led by William Labov, a group of scholars interested in variation in American English began to discover some new dimensions of systematic variation.[1] Past studies in American dialectology has described wide-meshed variation but had not accounted for it systematically. Using techniques borrowed largely from sociology, anthropology and psychology, Labov clearly demonstrated that ideolects lack the systematicity to be found in the grammar of a speech community and that gradient analysis yielded drastically different results from that provided by binary oppositions. Thus it became important to know not just whether or not a speaker produced a given sound or grammatical structure but the circumstances under which that form was produced (linguistic and psychosociological) as well as the frequency of occurrence of that form in relationship to consistent, comparable measures. Not all such scholars agreed with each other on the exact nature of this gradience, but the

excitement generated by the notion quickly led to an alignment with creole scholars such as William Stewart, who in 1964 presented his formulation of a continuum with an acrolect at one end and a basilect at the other (Stewart 1964:10-18). By this Stewart meant to indicate that speech communities could be plotted on a broad continuum rather than at artificial polarities such as standard or non-standard per se. Creolists had long argued that pidgins and creoles, languages which are under construction and are therefore dynamic, offered the best opportunity to see how language actually works.

At about the same time, the merging concerns of variationists and creolists were joined by a group of transformationalists who were becoming disenchanted, among other things, by the static nature of their premises. James McCawley, Paul Postal, Robin and George Lakoff, Charles Fillmore, John Ross and others began to raise objections against transformational syntax, noting its inability to accommodate real language, its failure to take into account that language is used by human beings to communicate in a social context and its claim that syntax can be separated from semantics.[2] These scholars, who are now referred to as generative semanticists, see variation as heavily involved in grammar whenever the social context of a discourse changes. One might dismiss the sentence, "Ernie thinks with a fork", as ungrammatical unless one knew that such a sentence is a response to the question, "How do you eat potatoes?". In her work on politeness, Robin Lakoff demonstrates the importance of context when she notes that when one addresses a child, "You may do so-and-so" it is politer than "You must do so-and so". But, in addressing a dignitary at a party, the hostess who says "You must have a piece of cake" is politer than one who says, "You may have a piece of cake" (Lakoff 1972:907-927).

All of this recent emphasis on social context by variationists, creolists and generative semanticists was, of course, old hat to ethnographers of communication. Dell Hymes had been arguing for a realistic description of language for many years, observing that institutions, set-

tings, scenes, activities and various sociocultural realities give order to such analysis.[3] An ethnographic approach to speech requires that the analyst have information about the relative statuses of the interlocutors, the setting of the speech act, the message, the code (including gestures), the situation, the topic, the focus and the presuppositions that are paired with sentences. At long last, the ethnographers of communication are beginning to get some help from linguists with other primary specializations. The upshot of all of this ferment within the past few years has been an almost entirely new set of attitudes within the field of linguistics. It is difficult to describe linguistics at any point in its history as being settled with an orthodoxy but some broad, general movements can be discerned with hindsight. In the forties and fifties we saw a structuralist emphasis, with a focus on phonology, a concern for the word and a philosophical framework which was positivistic and empirical. In the sixties we witnessed the transformationalist era, with a focus on syntax, a concern for the sentence and a philosophical framework which was rationalistic or idealistic, with innate knowledge and intuition playing a prominent role in analysis.

As C.-J. Bailey (1973) points out, in the seventies we are now entering a new period with an emphasis on discourse and a philosophical framework which is dynamic rather than idiolectal. He refers to it as the lectological epoch. It is characterized, of course, by the concerns noted above by the variationists, ethnographers, generative semanticists and creolists. Of particular concern to the interests of language learning is the underlying principle of the gradatum. Like many such principles, it is patently obvious when noticed yet conspicuously absent from the history of language teaching. There are several factors which interfere with its development and maintenance in the schools and a set of rather clear steps to be taken if we are to develop a socially relevant linguistics of bilingualism in our time.

We have already shown that for any interest in realistic language to develop in linguistics it was apparently necessary to become frustrated with the failures of the static approach. This is certainly not to say that nothing good has come from either of the recently prominent static models,

structural or transformational. On the contrary, we owe a great deal to the past for the accomplishments of current linguistics clearly build on the cumulative knowledge of preceding generations. A first break is one which the plus or minus nature of the analysis is subject to question. Traditionalists spoke in terms of correct or incorrect and the structuralists objected. Structuralists spoke in terms of observed and unobserved utterances and transformationalists objected. Transformationalists spoke in terms of grammatical or ungrammatical and, after a respectable period of mystified awe, practically everybody objected, citing examples of their own grammatical or ungrammatical sentences as evidence or retreating to the safe label of "in my dialect". Looking back, we can see that some things are neither correct nor incorrect but, rather, sort of correct or sort of incorrect. Likewise, some observed sentences may be performance errors and the reason why some sentences are unobserved is simply that you haven't asked the right question or listened long enough. Moreover, sentences are neither clearly grammatical nor ungrammatical unless a well-defined context is presented. Even then, the terms may be difficult if not impossible to press into service.

As noted earlier, Stewart hinted at such a gradatum in 1964 when he established the acrolect to basilect continuum. More recently, the term gradatum has been used to replace continuum to avoid the implication (from mathematics) that there is a finite number of steps apparent from one end to the other. The term gradatum suggests a slide rather than a stair-step, an image which is more in keeping with the way the language situation really is. Other recent evidences of the gradience principle can be seen in various papers presented at the Eighth Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society in 1972. John Ross' paper (1972: 316-328) demonstrated that even concepts such as noun are not fixed but involve degrees of "nouniness". At the same conference George Lakoff (1972:183-228) observed that "fuzzy" semantic concepts involve patterned gradience.

Since recent developments in linguistics have been so intimately involved in variability and realistic language in the framework of a gradatum, it would seem reasonable to examine the usefulness of this concept with regard to language learning. As is often the case, personal experience provides a good first example. When I was in college I had a part-time job in a wholesale grocery warehouse loading and unloading trucks and boxcars. My fellow teamsters knew that I was a college kid but also expected me to be one of them in some sense of the word. As a native speaker of their local version of non-standard English, I found it possible to use the locally acceptable "I seen him when he done it" forms but their linguistic expectations of a college kid made them suspicious of me every time I tried. Years ago the novelist Thomas Wolfe wrote a book called <u>You Can't Go Home Again</u>. His thesis was that people are the products of their changing environment and that this changing environment includes the changing expectations of others. Translated to our situation this means that no matter how uneducated a person's parents may be, they expect their child to speak something other than the non-standard English they grew up with. The child who is sensitive to his parents' wishes may respond by rattling off a locution that appears to be within the range of his parents' expectations. On the other hand, some situations may require him to not deny his heritage but to not appear uppity either. Precious few linguistic situations will require him to preserve his non-standard dialect exactly the way it was before he was educated and elevated to some other level of expectation by those who love him. The following sentences may serve as illustrations of some of the points on such a gradatum:

1. Hey! Don't bring no more a dem crates over here!
2. Hey! Don't bring no more a dose crates over here!
3. Hey! Don't bring no more a those crates over here!
4. Hey! Don't bring any more of those crates over here!
5. Please don't bring any more of those crates over here.
6. Gentlemen, will you kindly desist in your conveying those containers in this general direction?

Number 6 is surely undesireable in most communications and it is included only to extend the limits of the gradatum as far as can be imagined. Most

of the adjustments that an educated speaker makes to his audience are found in various modifications of numbers 3, 4, and 5. Most certainly, there are few opportunities for him to go home to the non-standardness of numbers 1 or 2. Those who know him will think he is patronizing them or, worse yet, making fun of them. Consequently, what the speaker does is to make subtle adjustments in his vocabulary, grammar and phonology depending on the informality of the situation, the audience and the topic. The safest move is to standardize the grammar, since grammar is the most stigmatizing aspect of American social dialects, while occasionally preserving a few of the less stigmatizing pronunciations and leaving in some flavor of the lexicon. This is a highly subtle and complicated linguistic maneuver which can hardly be oversimplified or underestimated.

Since language learning is frequently seen in the context of the school, it would be well for us to try to conceive of the types of interference such a gradatum might offer to the average classroom.

The most obvious handicap to developing the notion of gradatum in language learning in the schools comes from a deeply entrenched educational dictum in which it is felt that right is right and wrong is wrong and that there are no such things as degrees of rightness or degrees of wrongness. A second and equally deep-seated dictum is that it is good to be right and bad to be wrong. In no way should it be implied that the specific gradatum given as example above is meant to be a right to wrong slide. Each item of the gradatum has the potential for appropriateness and accuracy if the proper setting, topic and person is discovered. But the schools would be likely to take it as a right-wrong series with a sharp line between numbers 3 and 4 with wrong facing one direction and right facing the other. Likewise, all of the rights would be considered good and all of the wrongs would be thought bad. What such an oversimplification denies, of course, are the following things:

1. That language use is more complex than any presupposed context or pseudo-moral code will permit.
2. That users of language may intentionally select so-called stigmatized constructions.

3. That users of language may unintentionally select so-called constructions which, having been used, provide clear evidence of their having learned part of the pattern though not all of it.

The complexity of the gradatum.

It has been argued by linguists that people tend to be unable to perceive the fact that they are using language as they use it. One might ask, for example, if the fish see the water in which they are swimming. Much rather clear evidence seems to indicate that users of language are fairly unaware of how it is they are giving themselves away as they speak. Studies of social stratification using only language data may well be the most accurate indices of socio-economic status yet devised. Since people have such a hard time seeing the language they and others use (for they are, after all, concentrating on understanding it, not analyzing it), they remain relatively naive about the subtle complexities they are able to engineer in using it. Contrastive norms in language production and in subjective reactions to language are a clear case in point. Many New Yorkers and Detroiters, for example, will realize a high frequency of a stigmatized feature in their own speech despite the fact that they can clearly recognize that same feature as stigmatized in the speech of others.[4]

Many aspects of the complexity of the language gradatum may be observed in the bilingual setting. For example, if one is attempting to teach Spanish to Anglos in the Southwest while English is being introduced to Mexican-American children, what type of Spanish should be selected? An obvious response has been, "Why the best Spanish, of course". Such a statement implies that Castillian Spanish is better than that of the local variety, an observation which may be true in some places but may well be false in San Antonio. Other questions must be considered, the most important of which is, "Why is Spanish being taught?". If the answer is so that the children may share in each other's communication channels and cultures, then it seems obvious that the local version of Spanish is by far the richer version and the one to teach. Such a decision, of course, goes

against the schools' polarity orientation of right or wrong and argues against presupposing a single context for all language judgments.

On the other hand, recent research by R. C. Gardner and Wallace Lambert (1973) reveals that the mere presence of a community of native French speakers in Maine and Louisiana is not enough to motivate monolingual English speakers to learn French. A complex set of variables seem to be at work, not the least of which is the prestige commanded by the local French speaking community. If the French speakers are held in low esteem, there is little motivation for learning the language. In contrast, the primary motivation for learning French in Hartford, Connecticut where no discernible French speaking community exists, seems to correlate strongly with the learner's willingness to abandon his American identity in an almost unpatriotic fashion and associate himself with France (not French Canada or Louisiana).

In addition to the complexities growing out of community decision-making, context-orientation, presupposition and general variability, one more area of complexity to which linguists have only recently attended is quantitative variability. As odd as it now may sound, it has not been the practice of linguists to note the frequency of occurrence of a given variable feature until very, very recently. An amusing, internal argument is still going on between linguists who understand this principle and those who do not. It is said, for example, that copula deletion is a characteristic of Vernacular Black English as it is spoken in New York, Washington, D. C. and Detroit. Certain linguists violently object to this idea, noting that Southern Whites also say "He here" or "You gonna do it". And, of course, they are quite correct. What they fail to see, however, is that those who posit copula deletion as a characteristic of Vernacular Black English are not comparing Southern Whites to Northern Blacks but are, quite the contrary, concerned about what is considered Vernacular Black English in those specific Northern contexts. But even there, we find that speakers of that dialect do not delete every copula. In fact, the frequency of occurrence of that deletion stratifies quite nicely according to socio-economic status. Likewise, not every

Standard English speaker realizes every copula in his speech, although the frequency of occurrence is probably very high. An even clearer case is that of multiple negation which is also said to characterize Vernacular Black English, even though it is quite clear that many whites also use the form regularly. What, then, can it mean to call it Vernacular Black English? Simply that it is consistently found to occur in the continuous, natural speech of Blacks at a much higher frequency than it occurs in the speech of whites from the same communities and of the same socio-economic status. Strangely enough, this sort of finding is still rather new in linguistics and, to some linguists, quite heretical.

It will not be our purpose here to further detail the amazing complexities of various language gradatums. Earlier I noted the interest with which the topic is now being pursued by linguists, sociologists, anthropologists and psychologists, particularly in the areas of variation theory in which for the first time variable rules have been developed to make possible the formalization of systematic variation; in creole studies, in which it is becoming clear that new nodes of language family trees represent more than one parent; in studies of the ethnography of communication, in which the functions of language have long been championed; and in generative semantics, in which the static bonds of transformationalism have been recently cut, allowing for studies of gradience, implicational ordering of rules and many other new approaches.

The deliberate selection of stigmatized forms.

Once we dispose of the notion of the right-wrong polarity evaluation and conceive of language as a gradatum which operates in realistic contexts, the possibility of selectional options becomes meaningful. It is conceivable, for example, that a speaker out of a number of possible motivations, may select forms which, in some other context, would be considered stigmatized. Detailed studies of language variation have only begun to scratch the surface of such gradatums but several examples are suggestive of fruitful avenues of future research.

For example, I can clearly remember that as a child in a blue-collar industrial community, certain language restrictions were operational among pre-adolescent boys. To be an acceptable member of the peer group it was necessary to learn and to execute appropriate rules for marking masculinity. If a boy happened to be the toughest boy in the class, he had few worries for whatever else he did would be offset by this fact. Those of us who were not the toughest could establish our masculinity in a number of ways, many of which are well recognized. For example, the use of tough language, especially swearing, and adult vices, such as smoking, were sometimes effective means of obtaining such status. Likewise, if a boy were a good athlete, he could easily establish himself as masculine (in our society this was true only for football, basketball and baseball and not for sports such as swimming, soccer or tennis). On the other hand, a boy could clearly obtain negative points by having a non-sex-object relationship with a girl, by liking his sister, by playing certain musical instruments (especially piano and violin) and by outwardly appearing to be intelligent in the classroom. It is the latter avenue which is of interest to us here since the major instrument for adjusting one's outward appearance of intelligence was his use of oral language. Interestingly enough, what one did with written language seemed less crucial, as long as it remained a private communication between teacher and student. That is, a boy could be as smart as he wanted to on a test or an essay as long as the written document did not become public (i.e. become displayed on the bulletin board).

Thus two strategies for reasonably intelligent males in this society were as follows:

a. Keep your mouth shut in class. If the male is white, this might be interpreted as shyness. If he is Black, it usually is read as non-verbality. The strategy of keeping one's mouth shut in school is employed for different reasons at different times. In early elementary school the child soon learns that the name of the game is to be right as often as

possible and wrong as seldom as possible. One way to prevent being criticized by the teacher is to keep one's mouth shut. By pre-adolescence, the male's strategy for keeping his mouth shut grows out of a complex set of pressures stemming from stereotyped expectations of masculine behavior (i.e. boys are less articulate than girls and less interested in school) and the inherent dangers of appearing unmasculine to one's peers.

b. if you give the right answer, counteract the "fink effect" by sprinkling your response with stigmatized language. It is this strategy which boys who are to survive the education process in certain speech communities must certainly master. Those who only keep their mouths shut tend to drop out ultimately for whatever reasons. But males who learn to adjust to the conflicting pressures of school and peer pressure are those who have learned to handle the sociolinguistic gradatum effectively. In the proper context and with proper timing, an intelligent male can learn how to give the answer that the teacher wants in such a way that his peers will not think him a sissy. In English class he will learn how to produce the accepted forms with the subtle nuances of intonation and kinesics which signal to his peers that rather than copping out, he is merely playing the game, humoring the English teacher along. If he appears to be sufficiently bored, he can be allowed to utter the correct response. If he stresses the sentence improperly, he can be spared the criticism of selecting the accurate verb form. The six stage gradatum noted earlier in this paper is a gross example of several choices available in such a situation. It is tempting to postulate that the male's need to counteract the "fink effect" by deliberately selecting stigmatized language forms is merely a working class phenomenon. Recent personal observations, however, have led me to question such a notion. My teen-aged son has lived his

entire life in a middle-class, Standard English speaking environment but it is only since he began playing on a football team that he has developed a small number of non-standard English features. The production of these features, which include multiple negation and d for th in words like these and them, is situationally confined to the present or abstract condition of football. He appears to use the standard English equivalents in all non-football contexts. Closer observation seems to indicate that not all members of the football team feel the same requirement. It would seem, in fact, that there are different pressures for different roles. My son is a defensive tackle, a position which seems to require the characteristics of an agressive ape. Thus, apprentice apes must do everything possible to establish this condition. It is interesting to observe that pressure to select non-standard forms seems less evident among quarterbacks and flankers.

A second recent observation has to do with the diagnosis of reading problems in an affluent Washington, D. C. suburb. A well meaning third grade teacher has diagnosed one boy's reading problem as one of "small muscle motor coordination" and she suggested that the parents send him to a neurologist at once. His father, a physician, objected strenuously muttering something about teachers practicing medicine without a license. Since I knew the family, I was asked to help discover the child's real problem. After a quick and dirty examination in which the boy evidenced little or no problem with decoding or comprehending material which was unknown to him, the only problem I discovered was that his reading was monotonous and mechanical. In the school's terminology, he did not read with "expression". A hasty survey of teachers revealed that boys tend to not read with expression, a fact which is generally accepted along with their non-verbality and

dirty fingernails. Why didn't this boy read with expression? My hypothesis is that he considers it sissy. This boy is the smallest male in his class and he is using every means possible to establish his masculinity. In athletics what he lacks in skill he more than makes up for with careless abandon. His voice is coarse. His demeanor is tough. He swears regularly. And so on. It would behoove the schools to do several things here. One might question the usefulness of reading with expression at all, but teachers should certainly be able to distinguish this presumed problem from other types of reading problems, particularly neurological ones. But this seems to be evidence of the same sort of pressure, this time in a middle-class community, which pits school norms against peer norms to the extent that the child is willing to deliberately select the non-standard forms.

The unintentional selection of stigmatized language which evidences positive learning.

One type of unintentional selection of stigmatized language involves the use of hypercorrections, a term linguists use to refer to incorrect overgeneralization from already learned forms. Several years ago I noticed such a pattern in the development of my younger son's use of -en participles. Suddenly he seemed to be using the inflectional -en in all participle slots such as 'have thoughten', 'have senden' and 'have playen'. My first reaction was to drill Joel on the proper form but I soon realized that he was actually evidencing awareness of a newly acquired pattern. What he had not yet learned was how to sort the participles out into -en and non-en forms. That would take time, but it would come. Hypercorrection is perhaps more readily recognized by English teachers in the form of the malapropism, a vocabulary item which comes close to the sound of the word intended but which clearly misses, yielding

a humorous combination such as "prosecuting eternity". Grammatical hypercorrection yields equally pseudo-elegances such as "between you and I". In terms of how misconceptions about judgments about a speaker's intelligence, hypercorrections in vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar pose an interesting problem which illustrates clearly the need to see language in a realistic social and psychological context. Hypercorrections, when detected, can count double or more in degree of stigmatization. If undetected, it is unlikely to be favored more than neutral. Thus, when people make judgments about the language used by a speaker, there are at least three areas of judgment involved: stigmatization, favoring and hypercorrection. Detected hypercorrection probably runs the greatest risk of negative social stigmatization. Oddly enough, vocabulary hypercorrection (malapropism) is probably the most highly stigmatized, followed by pronunciation hypercorrection (the psuedo-elegance of vahz for vase, for example) and last by grammatical hypercorrection (such as "between you and I"). Stigmatization reverses this procedure, with grammatical features most stigmatized (at least in America), followed by phonological and lastly by vocabulary. This process of favoring is still relatively unknown, and it is difficult to tell whether vocabulary or grammar is the most favored condition. Clearly pronunciation is the weakest tool for favoring in our culture. Within each linguistic category (pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary), individual features can be placed and rank ordered, although the exact nature of this ordering is not totally known at this time.

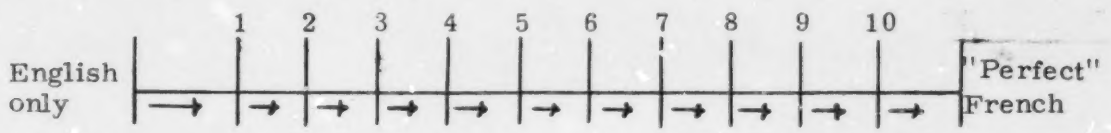
But even data from hypercorrection can be misleading in any effort to make judgments about intelligence based on language alone. Research in child language acquisition shows that children tend to regularize the past tense of irregular (strong) verbs--'comed', 'breaked', 'goed', 'doed' and so on. Regularization of this type continues into elementary school for some children. From a traditional psychological perspective one might expect to find that children begin by using some

regular (weak) forms correctly--like 'walked', 'helped' and so on--and that they then overextend this rule to the strong verbs. In actuality, however, the situation is different. In all of the cases which have been studied, the earliest past tenses are the correct forms of irregular verbs--'came', 'broke', 'went' and so on. Apparently these irregular verbs in the past tense--which are the more frequently used past tense forms in adult speech--are learned as separate vocabulary items at a very early age. Subsequently, as soon as the child learns only one or two regular past tense forms, he replaces the correct irregular past tense forms with the incorrect overgeneralizations from the regular forms. Thus, children actually say 'it came off', 'it broke off' and 'he did it' before they say 'it comed off', 'it breaked' and 'he doed it'. The crucial point here is that the irregular verbs, though they are frequent, are each unique--they do not follow a pattern, and evidently it is patterns to which children are sensitive.

The schools have not generally taken advantage of this sort of overregularization either as an indication of an acquired stage in the development of acceptable school English or as a positive indication that the speaker actually knows something in order to produce such a form. The usual school attitude or correct or incorrect polarity toward error-making often discourages such insights. Mistake making is seldom valued in the schools, and teachers soon learn to correct any errors that their children may make. This is incredibly short sighted, since not all errors are alike and many evidence more creativity and cognitive ability than the presumed correct ones. My son evidenced such creativity once when asked where Australia got its name. He pondered a minute, reflecting that the country was settled by prisoners who were ostracized by the British, and explained that Australia was derived from ostracized. It was a creative answer which just happened to be wrong. The classic example of a virtuous error is the widely-told story of the physics student who, when asked how to measure the height of a building using a barometer, replied that he would go to the owner of the building and

say, "If you'll tell me how tall your building is, I'll give you a barometer". Children experiment with language in much the same way. They try new combinations, they hypercorrect, they regularize irregular verbs and many other creative and highly cognitive schemes. Perhaps the schools would do well to recognize different types of errors for what they frequently are--evidence of high intelligence. In any case, it should be clear that hypercorrection may well be stigmatizing in one sense while evidence of creativity, intelligence or the natural developmental process in another.

A second type of the unintentional selection of stigmatized language which evidences actual progress along a gradatum of language learning can be found in the bilingual context. The gradatum of an English monolingual who is learning French may be schematized as follows:



Let is be observed, first of all, that the number of stages is infinite and most certainly not ten. This is only meant to be suggestive of the slide from one end to the other. Of particular importance above is that not one of the numbered stages is totally French but that number nine is much closer than number five. It is quite likely that the errors made at stage one are of a different order of predictability than those of stage ten. It has been hypothesized, in fact, that it is quite natural for learners of a language to produce errors of a certain type at one stage and errors of a different type at another. In fact, evidence of such errors can be taken as progress in the acquisition of the desired forms.[5] One might even speculate that teaching materials could be developed which have as their goal the progressive development of language learners from one stage of acceptable error making (i.e. learning) to another. Just as my younger son's extended and technically incorrect use of -en participles was evidence of his having progressed to a certain stage in the acquisition of that form, various technically incorrect stages in the

acquisition of French might well be considered desireable checkpoints along the gradatum of language learning. Supportive evidence for such a strategy can be found in the study of pidginization, which displays remarkable similarity to the stages of second language learning. Likewise, in variability studies involving Vernacular Black English, children who have deskes as the plural form of desk evidence clearly that they are well along in their development of the standard form desks whereas children who say desses are considerably less far along. It appears that the desses speaker uses the regular English morphonemic pluralization rule and adds -əz to his singular form, dess (bus/busses; dess/desses). Those who say deskes have simply caught on to the fact that there is a consonant cluster at the end of the word but they have not yet switched their pluralization rule (words ending in /p, t, k/ take /s/ forms). The weight of the newly acquired consonant cluster pattern seems to temporarily obscure the grammatical rule, causing a kind of suspension of disbelief commonly noted in learning of many types. Such a stage does not last long and probably does not deserve or require any particular teaching. Teachers actually should be pleased to discover such a form but the state of the art is still not developed enough to take advantage of it.

Summary.

In summary, this paper has briefly outlined the development of an exciting set of changes going on in the field of linguistics at the present time. From studies of the ethnography of communication, generative semantics, variation theory and pidgins and creoles has come a convergence of interests (though not methodology) which highlights the concept of gradatum in language. This concept was considered in the light of three aspects which have clear bearing on first and second language learning and teaching. The point was made that a number of complex issues are involved, including context, setting, intention, presupposition and variability, and that decisions concerning bilingual education must be

seen in relation to a manifestly larger number of questions than we have generally acknowledged in the past. It was also noted that speakers may deliberately select forms which have not been traditionally valued by the classroom and that we are beginning to determine something of the structure, value and predictability of these selections. Lastly, we argued that the unintentional selection of stigmatized features of language is a relatively untapped arena for learning about language learning and that the time has come to develop a sophisticated program of language learning which utilizes the predictable stages (including errors) in the acquisition of desired language forms. Without the concept of the gradatum and a developing concern for how to observe it, we could progress no further than we did during the right versus wrong, grammatical versus ungrammatical, idealistic and static periods of language study which have immediately preceeded us.

NOTES:

[1] See, for example, William Labov, The social motivation of a sound change, Word 19:273-309 (1963).

[2] For an account of the effects of social situation on formal grammar, see Charles Fillmore, A grammarian looks to sociolinguistics in R. Shuy (ed.), Sociolinguistics: current trends and prospects, Washington, D. C.: Georgetown University Press (1973).

[3] One might cite many references over a period of time. For a recent overview, however, see Dell Hymes, The scope of sociolinguistics in R. Shuy (ed.), Sociolinguistics: current trends and prospects, Washington, D. C.: Georgetown University Press (1973).

[4] See, for example, William Labov, The social stratification of English in New York City, Washington, D. C.: Center for Applied Linguistics (1966).

[5] See, for example, William Nemser, Approximative systems of foreign language learners, International Review of Applied Linguistics X. 3:115-124 (1971), and Larry Selinker, Interlanguage, International Review of Applied Linguistics X. 3:209-231 (1972).

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